

Ryan Hancharick
Source Water & UIC Section
U.S. EPA Region 3
Email: R3_UIC_Mailbox@epa.gov

Re: EPA Request for Postponement and In-person Hearing

Dear Mr. Hancharick

I write in response to the issuance of a draft permit PAS2D702BALL to Penneco Environmental Solutions, LLC, of Delmont, PA. Specifically, I object to the tentative public hearing currently scheduled virtually for June 28, 2022.

My first objection is based on the virtual format of the hearing. Having grown up in Allegheny County I know that it is a diverse community whose members are always ready to voice their opinions and stimulate healthy conversation; this, however, has traditionally been conducted via in-person hearings. The community of Plum Borough, Allegheny County which will be impacted by Penneco's objectives is primarily rural. I currently reside in a rural community and know that like my neighbors, Plum Borough and its constituents cannot be expected to have reliable, widespread access to online platforms such as MS teams. While a dial-in option has been presented, participants who have dialed in are easily overlooked and uncomfortable participating due to only being able to do so at a bare minimum level. As a result, a virtual hearing would discourage conversation from some members of the community and alienate others from attending altogether. Because the purpose of these hearings is to get comments from the entire community affected, a virtual hearing will not meet this purpose in Allegheny County.

Furthermore, The Environmental Protection Agency's "best practices for conducting virtual public hearings and meetings include documenting the reasons for conducting the public hearing or meeting virtually." Memorandum: Virtual Public Hearings and Meetings, page 2 (April 16, 2020). In the EPA's notice of hearing regarding the Penneco draft permit, there are no documented reasons for conducting the hearing online. The lack of such documentation combined with the community's tendency to be excluded from hearings when virtual, as previously discussed, is sufficient to warrant an in-person hearing at a later date.

My second objection relates to the short amount of time that the public has had to review and comment on highly technical information. Given the information constantly coming out about the dangers of shale gas development including the evidence of radioactive material being found in the water and soil waste materials from the extraction process, EPA should proceed cautiously and with full disclosure to the public. This will allow the public time to review the application so that it can make intelligent comments about the proposal. While the EPA published this notice on their website on May 26th, 2022, the public did not know about this hearing until June 14th. Even if given a full 30 days to review, there is a huge disparity between the preparation time and resources that the oil and gas industry has versus what we (local officials who are charged with protecting ourselves and the public) have to review application documents, research scientific facts and prepare comments.

I request the EPA postpone the hearing and hold it in person for the reasons outlined above, to allow appropriate participation from the public that will be impacted by the issuance of this permit.

Sincerely,

[illegible]